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EAST GERMANYMILITARYSoviet Army Manoeuvres in AKEN-DESSAU Area(27 July - 5 Aug 56)

1. (a) On 26 July 56 an East German official resident in the KOETHEN area told members of the local populace that large scale Soviet Army manoeuvres were to take place in the KOETHEN-AKEN-DESSAU area from 27 July to 5 August; the actual start of the exercise was to be 1130 hrs on 28 July 56.
- (b) The official further stated that the broad outline of the exercise was to consist of a wedge-shaped attack across the river ELBE from SOUTH to NORTH (i.e. from WEST bank to EAST bank); once the river was crossed this attack to continue in a two-pronged advance. The first prong of this advance was to consist of columns advancing through the ZERBST area and turning WEST to SCHOENEBECK (PC 96) with the object of cutting off enemy troops defending the EAST bank of the ELBE in the curve between DESSAU and SCHOENEBECK; the second prong (consisting of the main elements of the AFVs involved), to advance from the ELBE to ALTENGRABOW. The general line of attack was to continue towards the FLAMING area (BELZIG and BRUCK).
2. Build-up (27/28 July 56)
  - (a) From 1800 to 2000 hrs on 27 July 56 a total of 420 lorries (browsers, workshop-lorries, load-carriers and troop-carriers) passed through KOETHEN from the direction of RADEGAST continuing via KLEPZIG (TT 9436) and QUELLENDORF (UT 0237) to the HAIDEBURG forest where they laagered in cover near DIESDORF (UT 040385).
  - (b) During the night of 27/28 July approximately 280 further vehicles drove in the same direction with the same destination; approximately 80 x 152 mm gun-howitzers, 46 light AA guns (37 mm) and 33 x 7.62 and 8.5 anti-tank guns were towed by these vehicles.
  - (c) Between 0700 and 1200 hrs a total of 108 medium AFVs, the majority of them T.34/85s, plus 219 lorries with troops and equipment passed through KOETHEN with the same destination.
  - (d) During the afternoon of 28 July a train carrying 40 T.34/85s arrived at AKEN station and was unloaded, the tanks travelling via KLEIN ZERBST (TT 9745), ELSNIGK (TT 9742) and ROSEFELD (UT 0042) to QUELLENDORF.
3. Concentration (29 July 56)
  - (a) Strong elements of armour and artillery were seen concentrated in the area QUELLENDORF, DIESDORF, LINGENAU (UT 0736) and northwards to KOCHSTEDT.
  - (b) Large numbers of engineer (bridge-building) troops concentrated near the WEST bank of the ELBE in the woods between the river and the AKEN-DESSAU road.
  - (c) Armoured and motorised infantry units were concentrated SOUTH of the AKEN-DESSAU road, prepared to move off.

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- (d) What appeared to be the left flank covering force, consisting of light AA guns and BA 64s and APCs, was sited in the woods between MOSIGKAU and ROSEFELD. A similar force appearing to cover the right flank was situated between KLEIN KUHNIAU (UT 0647) and DESSAU.

(e) "Enemy troops"

The defending force holding the EAST bank of the ELBE lay between STEUTZ (TT 9952) and RODLEBEN (UT 0753); it consisted only of light forces of infantry and armoured cars.

(f) Observers and Staff

A grand stand and a signals station had been set up at RIETZMECK (UT 0251) (later occupied by general officers, and the site of a pontoon bridge).

4. Attack Preparation

- (a) During the morning of 30 July the artillery on the WEST bank went through the motions of firing a barrage and simulated shell bursts (exploding cannisters) were exploded on the EAST bank.
- (b) During the afternoon of 30 July the infantry advanced slowly with patrols in front, up to the edge of the WEST bank and dug in.
- (c) During the night of 30/31 July amphibious tanks, tracked amphibians and engineers advanced to the edge of the woods near the WEST bank and lay camouflaged near the edge of the woods.
- (d) From approximately midnight until 1000 hrs on 31 July all was quiet and there was no movement.

5. The Attack (31 July)

- (a) 1000 hrs: Infantry fire and LAA fire began on the WEST bank.
- (b) 1005 hrs: Amphibious tanks broke cover, firing their guns, and crossed the ELBE at five points on an approximately 4 kilometre front with BRAMBACH as centre; a total of 66 amphibious tanks was counted; infantry from the WEST bank continued covering fire.
- (c) 1011 hrs: A total of 43 tracked amphibians carrying infantry crossed the ELBE on the same front; the defending infantry on the EAST bank began to withdraw.
- (d) 1015 hrs (approx.): Engineer troops in motor boats and with pontoons began building a pontoon bridge near RIETZMECK.
- (e) (During 28 July a group of 6 twin-rotor helicopters and a group of 19 twin-rotor helicopters had landed on a prepared site in the Engineer Camp opposite BRAMBACH.) . At 1016 hrs (31 July) 25 of these helicopters loaded with infantry (approximately 30 men per helicopter) took off from the WEST bank and landed on the EAST bank. These aircraft made continuous flights with troops throughout the crossing.
- (f) 1016 hrs: The tracked amphibians had returned to the WEST bank and anti-tank guns were loaded and ferried across.
- (g) 1019 hrs: The first tank-carrying pontoon ferry was ready and carried a T.34/85 across to the EAST bank.

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- (h) 1020 hrs: The tracked amphibians had begun to return and were being loaded with one 2-axled ZIS (?) light lorry and ferried over to the EAST bank.
- (i) 1020 hrs: The second tank-carrying pontoon ferry was ready and began ferrying T.34/85s.
- (j) 1022 hrs: The third tank ferry was ready and began ferrying T.34/85s.
- (k) 1025 hrs: The tracked amphibians were loaded with quadruple barreled AA M.G. and ferried across.
- (l) 1027 hrs: The fourth pontoon ferry crosses.
- (m) 1030 hrs: The tracked amphibians continued taking lorries across.
- (n) 1035 hrs: The pontoon bridge at RIETZMECK completed and the first T.34 crosses.
- (o) 1035 hrs: The tracked amphibians move to opposite BRAMBACH and continue to ferry lorries, guns, motor-cycles and infantry across.
- (p) Jet aircraft attacked the retreating enemy continually. Helicopters continued ferrying troops until 1200 hrs when they leave in the direction of ZERBST.
- (q) Tanks and other weapons cross continually up to 1500 hrs when ferrying of gun-howitzers and LAA begins.
- (r) Between 1035 and 1200 hrs infantry advance on foot NORTHWARDS from the EAST bank bridge-head; at 1200 hrs they embuss and continue by lorry, as the beginning of the advance NORTH.
- (s) 1500 hrs onwards: Field kitchens, bowlers and rear echelon vehicles begin to cross EASTWARDS.
- (t) 1700 hrs: Amphibians cease to be used for crossings.
- (u) 1800 hrs: The ferries are dismantled.
- (v) Lorries cross the bridge continuously keeping a distance of 20 metres.
- (w) During the night traffic over the bridge ceases. (Not known when bridge dismantled.)

#### 6. Air Participation

- (a) On 27 and 28 July groups of 3/4 and 7/9 MIG jets flew continually over the area. They appeared to come from ZERBST and KOTHEN airfield.
- (b) A group of 6 and a group of 19 twin-rotor helicopters from the direction of ZERBST landed in the exercise area on 28 July.

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